

# How to Evaluate (and Write) Letters of Recommendation

**Cindy Ferrell, MD, MSEd**

**Oregon Health & Science University**

**Ann Guillot, MD**

**University of Vermont**

# Activity

On the paper sheets on the wall, please write words or phrases to include in a letter that says:

- Watch out for this person's lapses in professionalism
  - Watch out for this person's disorganization
  - I like this person as a resident in spite of his scores/grades

# Importance of LOR

“A LOR is a letter that makes a statement of support for a candidate....(it) should also present a well-documented evaluation, providing sufficient evidence and information to help a selection committee in making its decision.”

# What does the literature say?

- There is a significant difference in the content of confidential letters vs. non-confidential letters
- Predictability of letters in determining performance of residents is +/-

As a writer.....

# What Students Need to Provide You

- At least 2 weeks notice
- Deadline for submitting the letter
- Up-to-date CV
- Draft of their ERAS personal statement (if available)
- Complete information about their residency intentions
- Signed ERAS waiver form

### Medical Student Letter of Recommendation Worksheet

In order for me to write you as strong of a letter as possible, I like to get to know as much as I can about you and your medical school career/education. Please fill out the following and send back to me via email at [ferrello@ohsu.edu](mailto:ferrello@ohsu.edu)

If there is something you feel very uncomfortable with answering or would rather discuss in person, just leave the question blank or email me.

Thanks!

*Cynthia Ferrello*

---

Student name:

Deadline for letter completion:

Intended residency specialty:

Core clerkship grades:

Peds –

IM –

FM –

Psych –

~~Neuro –~~

~~OB/Gyn –~~

Surgery –

USMLE I:

USMLE 2 (if taken):

What do you feel are your strengths as a clinician?

What is hard for you clinically?

What qualities or experiences are going to set you apart from another residency applicant?

What are you most proud of in your medical school career?

What is it about your chosen specialty that gets you all jazzed up?

# What you should do

- To be legally safe:
  - Do not disclose sensitive or private information about an individual without written permission
  - Ask for waive of right to access
  - Only share factual, truthful and good faith statements
  - If there is pertinent negative information to include, inform the individual and ask if they still want you to write the letter



# What you should do

- To write a good letter
  - Put yourself in the shoes of the recipient of the letter – what would you be seeking?
  - Provide specific details about their strengths
  - Compare the student/resident with others that you have known
  - Share stories that illustrate the individual's qualities
  - Potential topics: student's potential, professionalism, interpersonal & leadership skills, passion for medicine, etc.
  - Don't reiterate the CV line for line
  - Write on official letterhead
  - Proofread your letter – especially the names

# More Tips

- If you agree to write the letter, please tell the individual when you will submit it and then keep your word and let them know when done
- The letter should be more than one paragraph – details about performance are helpful to the reader
- Keep a hard copy of the letter on your hard drive so that you can easily update it in the future for other opportunities

# Format of Good Letters

- Opening
  - Dear Program Director:
  - Include name and AAMC ID#
  - Indicate the nature and length of your relationship
- Body – use specific examples
- Closing –reiterate the strength of your overall recommendation
  - Would you recruit this person if you were a residency director? Would you take him/her as a fellow? Would you hire them as a partner?

# Generic Fellowship LOR

Dear ,

I am pleased to write this letter of recommendation for \*\*\* who is applying for your \*\*\* fellowship. I am a general pediatrician and director of the pediatric residency training program here at OHSU. I have known \*\*\* since she came to our training program in July \*\*\* and am writing based upon direct observation of \*\*\* in the outpatient clinic, review of his/her residency portfolio, and many conversations about his/her progress as a resident and his/her future career choices.

Overall as a resident,

Clinically,

Educationally,

I believe \*\*\* to be an \*\*\* candidate for an \*\*\* fellowship. She is well on her way to being a great general pediatrician and her commitment to patients as well her commitment to learning will serve her well as a fellow..

I hope you seriously consider his/her application.

# Generic LOR

Dear ,

I am pleased to write this letter of recommendation for \*\*\* who is applying \*\*\*. I am a general pediatrician and director of the pediatric residency training program here at OHSU. I have known \*\*\* since she came to our training program in July \*\*\* and am writing based upon direct observation of \*\*\* in the outpatient clinic, review of his/her residency portfolio, and many conversations about her progress as a resident and her future career choices.

Overall as a resident,

Clinically,

Educationally,

I believe \*\*\* to be an \*\*\* candidate for \*\*\*. She is well on her way to being a great general pediatrician and her commitment to patients as well her commitment to learning will serve her well.

I hope you seriously consider his/her application.

# Reviewing LOR

- Advice from the trenches
  - Know the author (chairman? PD? Attending?)
  - Look for specifics
  - Can you assess skills or behaviors from the content?
  - If inconsistencies or unclear – ask the student

## Discussion